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ABSTRACT

To help school administrators improve their communication and public relations programs, the National School Public Relations Association presented 23 mini-workshops in a special session at the 1979 annual meeting of the Association of School Business Officials. This handbook presents the "tip sheets" prepared by the 23 workshop presenters, along with each presenter's address and telephone number. The first six tip sheets, in section 1, discuss staff public relations for school business officials and the school support staff, including relations with the school board, the community, and the legislature. Section 2 looks at budget and finance issues; its six tip sheets suggest ideas about budget planning and elections, mass media, school finance law, cost increases with enrollment decreases, and business office advisory committees. The three presentations in the third section examine pupil transportation, cutbacks in transportation, and student behavior on buses. The eight tip sheets in section 4, involving public relations with students and the community, cover news releases, school and district publications, community group involvement, relations with realtors, school desegregation, energy management, and labor relations. (RW)

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Field-Proven Programs for Better Public Relations

Tried and proven public relations programs that are helping school districts — and particularly school business offices — enhance their images and improve their communications with the publics they serve.

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THE ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL BUSINESS OFFICIALS OF THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA is an international professional educational organization, incorporated not for profit, and is the oldest and largest education organization in North America devoted exclusively to the improvement of school business management. Its main objectives are to encourage the wise expenditure of taxpayers' monies, and to improve efficiency in the practice of school business management.

Field-Proven Programs for Better Public Relations

Tried and proven public relations programs that are helping school districts — and particularly school business offices — enhance their images and improve their communications with staff, parents, students and the communities they serve.

As presented during a Special Session on Public Relations and Communications at the 65th Annual Meeting and Exhibits of the Association of School Business Officials, October 15, 1979, Denver, Colorado.

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Preface

The basic, underlying professional objective of the Research Corporation of the Association of School Business Officials (RC-ASBO) is to identify and share timely, appropriate information about successful school business management practices. This public relations publication is another example of how RC-ASBO programs meet this objective.

With the many challenges — both new and old — facing school administrators, public relations has assumed an increasingly important role over the past few years in a school district's overall communications program. With declining enrollments, tighter budgets, accountability and increased pressures from various special interest groups, school districts want and need the support of the various publics they serve. To initially gain that support and to hold it, school districts are communicating more than ever before with students, parents, staff and the communities they serve. The basic thrust of these communications efforts is better public relations: helping these groups better understand the meanings of existing programs and the reasons for changes in the face of newly emerging challenges.

Some of the challenges of the 1980s are shaking the very foundations of education as we know it. To meet these challenges, school administrators are improving their communications and public relations programs and in so doing, solidifying the support of their communities. The programs included in this book are prime examples of what can and has been done.

These field-proven programs for better public relations were presented during a special 90-minute educational session during the 65th Annual Meeting and Exhibits of the Association of School Business Officials of the United States and Canada (ASBO) in Denver, Colorado, October 13-18, 1979. The session presented by ASBO and the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) included 23 mini-workshops, each featuring a successful, field-proven program, practice, technique or method for better public relations.

ASBO and NSPRA acknowledge the contributions made by the presenters and by those within the presenters' respective school districts to the success of the Special Session on Public Relations.

In addition to sharing valuable communications and public relations ideas, these programs provide a resource listing of the names, addresses and phone numbers of individuals and school districts who are willing to share greater details about their respective programs and public relations ideas with other educators.

Signed,
Dr. James L. Slater, RSBA
RC-ASBO Executive Director

Introduction and Acknowledgements

The National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) was pleased to have an opportunity to work with the Association of School Business Officials of the United States and Canada (ASBO) in developing a Special Session on Public Relations for the 65th Annual Meeting of the Association in Denver, Colorado, October 13-18, 1979. In a 90-minute "mini-workshop" session, participants were able to attend five of 23 individual workshops on "Field Proven Programs for Better Public Relations."

Drawing on its experience of six years in providing PR mini-workshops at major educational gatherings, NSPRA brought to Denver top communication specialists, administrators and business officials whose successful PR programs have served as exemplary models.

Workshop leaders described their field-proven programs for building better public relations for the staff, community and students, for budget and finance campaigns and pupil transportation. Each of the leaders prepared a "tip sheet" of the information he or she presented. These were collated and distributed to those in attendance in a "Gold Mine Packet."

The material presented in this book is a compilation of the tip sheets developed for ASBO's Annual Meeting and Exhibits. Leaders have all agreed to have their material included in this publication so that their successful programs can be used to imrove public relations programs across the United States and Canada.

The NSPRA Executive Board, Staff and members are particularly pleased to have joined with ASBO in the presentation of the session in Denver and in the preparation of this book. School business officials probably interact with more school district publics daily than any other administrative group. At NSPRA we think *It is Time To Get Serious About School Public Relations.* This book tells you how.

We are indebted to the following leaders whose work is included:

James D. Allen, Supervisor of Transportation, St. Vrain Valley Public Schools, Longmont, Colorado.

Maureen Anderson, Information Services, Englewood Public Schools, Englewood, Colorado.

Cary D. Baird, Supervisor of Public Relations, Aurora Public Schools, Aurora, Colorado.

Stephen M. Barrett, Supervisor of Public Information, St. Vrain Valley Public Schools, Longmont, Colorado.

Rodney L. Bartels, Director, Research, Evaluation and Development, Weld County School District No. 6, Greeley, Colorado.

Sarah Bennett, Administrative Assistant to the Superintendent, Poudre School District R-1, Fort Collins, Colorado.

Dr. Paul G. Bethke, Director of Research, Colorado Education Association, Englewood, Colorado.

Florence Brown, Information Officer, Thompson School District, Lovelend, Colorado.

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W. Wayne Warner, RSBA, Assistant Superintendent of Business Services, Topeka Public Schools, Topeka, Kansas.

Frank E. Winzenburg, Business Manager, Fairmont Public Schools, Fairmont, Minnesota.

Signed,
Dr. John H. Wherry
Executive Director
National School Publ. Relations Association

Table of

Contents

Page

Preface iii
Introduction and Acknowledgements iv
Section 1 — Better Staff Public Relations 1
Basics for Good Business Office PR 1
The Board of Education: A Key Public for the Business Office 3
PR Training for the "Professional" Support Staff 5
Staff Communication Ideas That Really Work 7
Problem Solving — A Planning Process for Better Public Relations and Communications 9
How to Communicate With the Legislature So They Really Hear You 14
Section 2 — Better Budget and Finance Public Relations 17
Community and Staff Involvement in Budget Planning 17
Passing School Finance Issues — Working With the Media 18
Making Sense of the Budget — Explain It, Personalize It and Sell It! 20
School Finance and the Courts (or I Have Some Good News and Some Bad News For You) 21
Enrollment Down/Cost Up: How to Explain it to Your Community 22
Form an Advisory Committee for Your Business Office 23
Section 3 — Better Pupil Transportation Public Relations 25
Communications and the School Bus Transportation Department: Things You Can Do Now to Improve Public Relations 25
Communicating Cutbacks in Transportation Service 27
Kids Behave on Our Buses 28
Section 4 — Better Community and Student Public Relations 30
News Releases That Make News 30
School District Publications 31
Preparing a Booklet-Style School Calendar 33
Working With Community Groups on Special Projects 35
Working With Realtors 36
School Desegregation and Public Relations 38
Public Relations Aspects of Energy Management Programs 40
Crisis Communications During Labor Problems 42

Section 1

Better Staff Public Relations

Basics for Good Business Office PR

As Presented by Stephen M. Barrett
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School business offices are responsible for communicating basics: what they are doing, how they are doing it, when they are doing it and how much it costs. Many times, school business officials take a "behind the scenes" approach to communicating. Here are a few techniques that are "basics" to being up front in communicating what's going on in the school business office:

Financial Services (Payroll)

- Distribute information explaining what the various codes on a check stub mean.
- Provide literature explaining insurance (health, life, etc.) provisions to employees.
- Develop an insurance benefits brochure or ask your district's carrier to provide one.
- Set up quarterly meetings for insurance representatives to meet with staff members to answer individual questions.
- Develop an approved list of vendors for tax sheltered annuities and make certain that your district's employees know the process for signing up: feature information in internal staff newsletters; prepare a handout or brochure on TSA's; keep clippings from consumer magazines explaining benefits and pitfalls.
- Disseminate information about the complaint procedure for payroll problems: Is it generally known who can handle these?
- Develop regular Board reports on how and where money is invested for review quarterly.
- Develop a budget summary for year-long use with "easy" visuals to explain where the money is going.
- Develop a brief communique for each paycheck if you don't have a large "information" budget.

Purchasing and Accounts Payable

- Promote and publicize group purchasing or cooperative purchasing for dollar savings and other benefits.
- Devise a process for systematic feedback so you can learn what the troops think about the products you're buying.
- Ask vendors about payment schedules. Are they satisfied? Are you in trouble?
- Set up regular bid opening procedures and timetables and stick with them. Conform to standard practices and laws and don't violate their integrity, or your own local procedures.
- Stress "local" purchasing whenever and wherever possible.
- Develop a "quantities" report for year-end presentation to your Board of Education and the media.

Transportation

- Develop an on-going relationship with local police, fire and news media representatives. Have an emergency procedures plan of action for all three groups.
- Stress "bus safety" in the beginning and middle of the school year. Seek local media support and involvement.
- Devise recognition procedures for drivers: Bus rodeos, driver of the month and so on. Keep them informed.
- Hold regular "safety" meetings to discuss safety, routes, discipline and policies. Don't be afraid to use professionals to help you get messages to and from drivers.
- Spend some time negotiating or devising an equitable system of awarding overtime runs and/or field trips.
- Promote safety by quantifying "safe" miles run in a year. Promote preventative maintenance programs to the Board and local media
- Stress the communications role of the driver as the first and last contact of the school day.

Maintenance

- Plan a beginning of the year report to the Board of Education on summer projects, costs and completions.
- Get involved in energy conservation programs and work with principals to save energy.
- Examine your purchasing practices and prices regularly, especially in the area of chemicals and custodial supplies. Keep on top of these.
- Develop a plan for preventative roof maintenance.
- Use slides, photographs or other visuals to show problems at Board and/or staff meetings. A picture is truly worth a thousand words. "Before" and "after" pictures are dynamite.
- Assemble a "completed" projects report or presentation to show accomplishments. Use slides, charts and overheads but let people know what you've done.

- Bring custodial personnel into school "family" meetings. They are key communicators.

Food Service

- Establish an ongoing process for informing people of school lunch menus through newsletters, newspapers or bulletin boards and other means.
- Hold regular staff meetings for food service personnel to discuss problems, menus, service and so on.
- Promote good nutrition with help from school nurses and area health agencies.
- Establish an advisory council of students, parents, teachers and interested parties. Hold tasting parties for students to advise on likes and dislikes.
- Give tours of kitchen to students and parents to show how food is prepared.

The Board of Education: A Key Public for the Business Office

As presented by H. D. Pearson
Secretary to the Board of Education
Dallas Independent School District
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Financial constraints . . . Proposition 13 . . . budget options . . . changes in the school finance system . . . initiative and referendum. These are just a few of the issues facing beleaguered school business officials today.

Unfortunately, the procedures and services of a school district's business office are sometimes among the least publicized and most misunderstood aspects of many school systems. Not only are the public and the staff often misinformed as how the business office functions — but many times, so is the Board of Education.

Yet, open, honest communications between school business officials and trustees is fundamental in reaching out for solutions to the tough decisions brought about by the ever-shrinking school dollar. As a key part of this effort, the school business official must see that PR begins at home. Members of the Board of Education set the tone since they deal with school business procedures, day-in and day-out. The school businees official — working through the Superintendent — must make sure that he or she has a systematic plan for

making board members aware of the business practices in the district. Communicating financial procedures to the staff, public, key community leaders and local businessmen and women builds trust that schools handle public funds wisely and use sound business practices. *Here are eight tips for the school business official in working with the board of education.*

1) Prepare a pamphlet or brochure which includes tax information, bond ratings and budget information for the current school year. Make these brochures available to the schools, at board meetings and during community meetings. Keep the school budget process an on-going, year 'round process with the Board of Education involved.
2) Make sure that all board members have an understanding of the school district's business practices and school finance. Distribute a fact sheet concerning the department and its services to the school board and staff. Perhaps you might develop an information brochure titled, "25 of the Most Often Asked Questions About Business Services in the School District." This information could be sent to citizens of the district.
3) Ask local businessmen to help the district evaluate and improve the school business program. Publicize the positive aspects they find as well as the planned method of improvement.
4) Make copies of the annual audit available to the public, and publish a news release concerning the audit, listing places where the report can be examined, such as banks, libraries and the Chamber of Commerce office.
5) If your school district conducts an annual public opinion survey on the system, include a section on school finances and business practices. Use the results in planning future communications efforts.
6) Review district business practices through a systematic, on-going report to the Board of Education. Make sure that in regular comuniques to the board, the Superintendent keeps trustees up-to-date on rules, regulations or government guidelines having an impact on the district's business practices and procedures. Don't wait until the day of a board meeting to surprise trustees with such information.
7) Make sure trustees understand their role. Trustees approve or disapprove of school business matters, but don't have the time to try to handle district business activities. Make sure that board members know where to refer citizens with problems concerning school finance.
8) Ask other central office employees and school staff members to help communicate business practices and procedures to the public. Keep fellow staff members informed so they can help spread the word, too.

PR Training for the "Professional" Support Staff

As presented by Maureen Anderson
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Parents and community persons have many impressions and experiences with schools. These impressions often influence their attitude toward the schools. Often, members of the support staff are the ones most frequently contacted by these persons. The support staff plays a vital role in the smooth operation of every school and every school district. Yet, how often do we let members of the support staff know how important their role is? And, how often do we help them increase their skills and awareness in order to do their job more effectively and with greater satisfaction.

Take a close look at the role of your office personnel, food service employees, aides, transportation and maintenance staff. How can you recognize their value? How can you help them do their job more effectively?

Provide Recognition and Reward Good Performance

- Give a positive, comprehensive media thrust to each group of support staff during the week in the year that nationally recognizes their role, i.e., National Bus Safety Week, National Secretaries Week, National School Lunch Week.
- Recognize the work of these departments and individuals in the departments in your school and district publications. Be creative — why not include those in bookkeeping or purchasing? Make all publics aware of the roles of the support staff and who these employees are.
- Consider a special luncheon, social event or seminar to build *esprit de corps* and to recognize the importance of support staff members. Timely topics such as stress reduction or time management may be helpful to them and show the district's value and esteem for them.
- Let all support staff know they are an important part of the school or district's team. Regularly include them in meetings and workshops. Their input in a session on "Building Confidence in Your Schools" would be valuable.
- Keep them informed on curriculum improvements, changes in policies and new thrusts and directions in the school system. Because they are in contact with a wide range of the district's public, and because many live in the community, keeping them informed can pay big dividends.

- Give special attention to their activities and participation in training clinics. Bus drivers usually participate in safe-driving clinics at the beginning of the school year. The Maintenance Department may hold special training sessions in helping make school buildings more energy efficient. Custodians may be recognized for improved performance in using new equipment or products. Their professional associations may have officers or programs which you can share with the total staff in your district.
- Consider orientation sessions for new support staff employees. You might even consider having substitute teachers used by your district attend this or a separate orientation session.
- Thank you notes for jobs well done are always appreciated by individuals.

Provide Motivation and Information to Increase Their Communications Skills

- Have them brainstorm in small groups to list "The Good Things About Our Schools". Have a reporter from each small group share ideas with the large group. Write each on a blackboard or chart paper. Check those ideas that are repeated. The list will undoubtedly be impressive. People will feel good about the place they work and be encouraged to share their good feelings and information with others.
- Define what area of their job performance you can focus on for an in-service workshop. Workshops for secretaries might focus on typing newsletters, preparing art work for notices to parents, answering the telephone, ways to deal with angry parents and so on. Ideas for food service personnel include giving clear directions, how information retold several times tends to be distorted, influence of body language on communication and the value of rewarding behavior they want to see continued.
- Workshop leaders can be outside consultants, a person from a neighboring school district or one of your own staff members. For a workshop on newsletters, you might use a principal who does an outstanding job, an art teacher, a graphics teacher, a journalism teacher, and/or a person in charge of printing. Your local phone company may have a workshop and visuals on using the telephone. Your district psychologist would be a good resource person for a workshop on dealing with angry parents.
- Your school district may or may not have films, tapes or filmstrips on communications and human relations. If not, check your local public library for these. Check under many topics and utilize the librarian's knowledge to help you locate the best visual for your needs. Preview the visual first to learn if it is appropriate for the group you are working with, what advance preparation needs to be done and if written summaries will help reinforce the learnings.

Staff Communication Ideas That Really Work

As presented by Kenneth Forkos
Assistant Director-Finance
Division of Internal Business Management
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Superintendent of Schools
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What is "communication?" There are as many answers to that as there are people. For school business officials, however, communications should be defined as "a process that involves the transmission and reception of an idea — a process that is an essential tool of management."

Methods — When we have an idea, thought or need to convey to others, the first step is to select the most appropriate vehicle. Among our choices are:

- *Oral* — everyday contacts, staff meetings, periodic conferences and the "grapevine."
- *Written* — memos, bulletins, letters, surveys, procedural manuals, annual reports and employee publications.
- *Pictorial* — drawings, diagrams, pictures, charts, examples and so forth.
- *Actions* (the most often ignored) — slamming a door, frowning, smiling, listening, giving praise and almost any other action — or lack of action.

Types — The next decision is the type of communication. Some choices are one-way (usually downward), two-way (individual to individual), grapevine, intentional or unintentional, formal or informal, expressed or implied.

Problems . . . Things to Consider — It is important to recognize the human weaknesses that hinder transmission and reception. People don't always listen well. We need to capture their attention. People don't always understand what they read. In their haste to read something, people often overlook much that was written.

Consider the attention span of your target. If a letter is long and complex, someone may put it aside to read later "when they have more time."

People "hear" according to their individual backgrounds and experiences, which may be different from yours. Is what we said or wrote what we meant to say? The idea may be clear in our minds, but can anyone else see it? Have we asked for feedback to be sure the correct message was received? Is the door open for negative feedback as well?

Critical Areas — If the following points are considered, they will not

necessarily guarantee success, but using them may lessen the possibility of misunderstandings and failure.

- *Content* — be sure of what you want to say. Say it clearly and concisely, giving all the facts and not omitting anything pertinent.
- *Verbal or written techniques* — watch your speech patterns, voice style and choice of vocabulary. Consider the recipient.
- *Non-verbal behavior* — watch your gestures, facial expressions and body movements.
- *Time* — make time, and take time, to plan and to communicate properly.

Ideas That Really Work

- Communications will flow more easily if responses are welcomed. This brings in the element of participation. Even if response is negative, a communicator should be willing to listen.
- Success in communications depends heavily on the willingness of the recipient to accept what is said. Therefore, not only plan what to say, but how to say it.
- Make letters brief and to the point so your message doesn't get lost in a lot of verbage. Avoid long words, redundancy, useless phrasing or unfamiliar terminology. Write as if you were speaking to the person.
- Read letters over before sending them out. Or better yet, have someone else (your secretary?) tell you what it says to see if the proper intended meaning has been conveyed.
- Be sure to follow-up periodically to reinforce the idea that it is required if a letter is detailed or complex, or if it contains something the reader doesn't want to do.
- Gain acceptance of a new idea by sharing the reasoning behind what is being conveyed.
- Be sure to communicate upward as well as down and across. Your supervisor would like to know what's going on. (This also reduces the necessity for your supervisor to follow up.)
- Put it in print — "who does what" and "who knows what."
- Try informal coffee sessions for your business office staff — update them on district-wide concerns on a regular basis.
- Turn people on by being positive yourself.
- Try budget study committees (district and/or community). Merchandise your budget process.
- Get your staff member out in the schools to see the end results of their work.
- Try monthly or quarterly financial reports — with one-page summaries to all staff and community leaders. Display dollars received, total to that period, update cash flow, etc.
- Provide community information on school finance in easily-understood terminology.

- Meet with local Chamber of Commerce leaders to go over budget highlights; keep them updated.
- Arrange a tour (or slide presentation) of schools and facilities for board members prior to budget time. Let them see the chief items in terms of people instead of just figures on paper.
- Become a speaker on behalf of your district. Don't limit yourself to financial subjects.

Whatever time you invest, it will be worth every minute!

Problem Solving — A Planning Process For Better Public Relations and Communications

As presented by Rodney L. Bartels
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Phone: 303/352-1543

The following material is based on a publication entitled "Problem Solving: A Planning Process" which was developed by the Weld County School District #6. This planning process can improve communications and enhance public relations with staff members and others.

In the introduction to this publication, Dr. William A. Mitchell, our district's Superintendent, notes:

This material is a process for doing formal, long-range problem solving. School administrators are involved in less rigorous planning all the time but there are certain situations that require in-depth planning (and communications) as we prepare for major improvement activities or programs.

This planning process will help administrators concentrate on solving priority needs, selecting the best solutions, developing comprehensive action plans and helping to consistently realize the achievement of "targeted" goals, objectives and outcomes.

This model is developed for your use. How it is used, when it is used and which portions are applicable to a given situation must be determined by the individual administrator.

Providing quality leadership requires much skill, knowledge and experience. Hopefully this problem-solving guide will make the task easier.

What's happening? Why is there a need to do problem-solving? Who are the people that will be members of this planning team?

1) Staff
2) Students
3) Community (parents and non-parents)
4) Consultant
5) Administration

Where are we? Analyzing everything we know about this particular situation, what are we "doing" or accomplishing?

Brainstorm — Write down everything you can about the situation. Put down whatever comes to mind. You might find out later that it has some relation. Think about whether there might be any other related areas you haven't thought of yet.

Which of these go together because they are alike or related is some way? How do you know?

The groupings may help in seeing the need. At this stage, it may be helpful to have a friend or a well-trusted, honest group look at the data. Ask for additional data and clarification as needed until the problem is identified.

1) What is our *goal*? Where do we want to be? What is the *ideal*? What do we want to accomplish? To what degree does that desired condition exist now? Why? To what degree should this condition exist? Why?
2) Analyzing the figure that follows, determine the independent survival point or minimal outcome desired for this program. The goal is the ideal, the independent survival point is the necessary level of achievement required to be a contributing member of society.

3) What is the *need*? What is the gap between where we are and where we want to be? Define the need by writing it out in a complete sentence using the following guide: When? Who? Under what conditions? What is the minimum performance level? How will it be measured?

Understanding the Cause of the Need

1) Infer possible causes for the need. Brainstorm.
2) How do we know these are possible causes for this need? Do these causes exist in this situation?
3) What are the main causes for this need?
4) What might be some of the ways these causes could be alleviated?
5) How do we know that these solutions might alleviate the cause of the need? What other conditions would have to be present for these solutions to alleviate the cause of the need? Is it likely these conditions will be present? If these questions are answered positively, there is a strong chance that this is a good solution.

Do We Want to Eliminate This Need?

1) The need has been identified, clarified and verified. Now, is this really a need we want to work on? Why?
2) If we work on this need and solve it, the results will make a significant difference by . . .
3) Analyzing the answers above, is it our plan to proceed with solving this need?

In delevoping ways to solve the problem, pertinent background information must be collected, a guide on doing research might be helpful in setting up and carrying out a research program.

What, then, would we conclude to be the best solution to the problem?

What part of the current practice might the solution replace or convert?

Focusing on the Solution(s)

Realistically, in analyzing the proposed solution(s), there will be opposing forces for and against. Before trying to develop a plan to solve the problem, let's identify the supporting and blocking forces, create solutions, and develop an action plan. A form like the one below will be helpful.

Focus on Solutions

1. Statement of goal: _____

2. The situation: _____

3	4	5	6	7
Forces for (support) Brainstorm forces for	Forces against (blocks) Brainstorm forces against	Critical Blocks Prioritize forces against	Possible solutions Brainstorm solutions to prioritized blocks	Action Plan

Now let's compare our proposed solutions to the problem and to the possible blocking and support forces. Are the proposed solutions still the best? What are some possible alternatives?

Selection of Solutions

This form will help evaluate the alternatives:

Selection of Alternatives

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
ACCEPTANCE BY:										
Total Points										
Administration										
Staff										
Parent										
Student										
Points										
Effect on Student Achievement										
Points										
Time Required of People										
Points										
Dept. or School Ability to Develop Program Solution										
Points										
District Budget										
Points										
Contributions to Dist. Goal(s)										
List of Various Solutions										

Based upon everything we know about the various options, the following solution is the one we have selected:

1.
2.
3.
4.

Rating Scale

High positive impact	5
Positive impact	4
No impact	3
Somewhat negative impact	2
Very negative impact	1

Before beginning to develop an action plan to implement the proposed change, communication with and reactions from staff, students, the

community and the administration at the building or district level will be helpful.

In Planning for Action

What must we do? What student, staff or program outcomes are anticipated? Who or what is our target group? Who will carry out the plan? When do we hope to implement the various components of the plan? What is the extent of the project? Who will be served? What will it "cost" to ignore or not develop a response to the need?

What support will be needed from: The Board of Education? District Administration? Building Administration? Other?

The support needed will be obtained by . . . What staff development activities will be needed? Initially from the administration, staff and others.

Ongoing from the administration, staff and others.

Describe the ongoing communication plan that will be followed to inform the various publics.

This form or one like it, can be used to implement the plan:

Implementing the Plan

Administrative Monitor _____ Task Force _____

Statement of Program Improvement Need: _____ Date _____

_____

Statement(s) of Program Outcomes: _____

(when) (who)

_____

(under what conditions) (does what)

_____

(minimum performance level)

_____

(how it will be measured)

_____

Related to:

District Goal(s) = _____

For School Year _____ to _____

Review Code:

A — On Target D — Deleted
B — Behind Schedule E — Revised
C — Completed F — Continued

Planned Activities to meet program outcomes:	Assigned to:	Target Dates:	Key Task Standard Results, Conditions, Etc.	Quarterly Review 1	2	3	4

Carry out the solution. Observe or evaluate the effects. Are the effects the same as the ideal situation. The ideal? If it is the same, or near enough to be satisfactory, the problem has been solved. If the effects are significantly different from the ideal, then review the other proposed alternatives and carry out a new possible solution.

How to Communicate With the Legislature So They Really Hear You

As Presented by Dr. Calvin W. Hall
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Effective communication with your legislators should begin long before you need assistance with solving a problem:

- Have a process for orienting new legislators;
- Keep them informed of significant changes in services your organization provides their electorate;
- Know the legislators' staff members and keep them informed;
- If your agency has a Public Information Office, use his/her services extensively to develop approaches and positive contacts.

When working with legislators, remember you are selling an idea. You have a limited time to capture/retain their attention.

What they see/hear — is what you get:

- Be concise.
- Give direct answers; don't cloud issues.
- Remember that the public relations potential of your efforts will probably be determined within the first minute.

Use the "KISS" principle; "Keep It Super Simple." Being long-winded will hurt your case. You are dealing with very busy individuals.

Get the message across effectively in these ways:

- Try to always have a one-page summarization.
- First — succinctly state what you want.
- Second — provide the rationale/explanation/statement of the problem.
- Use "lay" language — avoid professional jargon.
- Present concepts in the simplest manner possible.
- Don't assume that the reader/listener is familiar with the problem.

- Use simple charts/graphs to illustrate major points/concepts.
- A single picture can be worth a thousand words.

Get the facts straight:

- Do your homework.
- Don't fake an answer — if you don't know, admit it.
- Don't attempt to overpower with your knowledge of facts.

Maintain a flexible position:

- Remember that the art of politics is compromise.
- See the big picture.
- Recognize that each legislator has many different and diverse constituencies and he/she may also have to sell your idea to others.

Here's an example:

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
SB 260

Summary

This bill:

1) Authorizes the transfer of up to $50 million from the unexpended balance of the SB 154 K-12 appropriation to partially offset the underfunding of the county superintendents' SB 154 block grant;
2) Makes several restricted balances of county superintendents subject to the "reserves recapture" provisions of SB 154;
3) Reduces the non-recapturable reserves of the county superintendents from 5% to 3% of general fund revenue.

Background

The formula contained in SB 154 would have required approximately $176.4 million to fund the county superintendents of schools block grants. However, SB 154 appropriated only $108.4 million, thereby creating a $68 million deficit.

The Department of Education traces this underfunding to three causes:

a) An unexpected growth in special education and juvenile hall programs (%38 million);
b) an overestimation of the amount of the 10% reduction factor to be applied to the block grant ($19 million);
c) an overestimation of the amount of reserves which would be recaptured ($11 million).

One contributing element not considered in the Department's analysis is the treatment of Direct Service and Other Purpose Apportionments ($22 million). Although these apportionments were not contained in the calculation of the county superintendents' block grants, they were nevertheless paid from the amount of money appropriated to fund the block grants (because the appropriation was "in lieu" of any other general state aid to the county superintendents).

Comment

Provisions (2) and (3) of the bill will cause county superintendents to fund about $10 million of the deficit with reserves.

Since it is not clear at this time that there will be a surplus in the K-12 portion of SB 154, the bill should be amended to contain an appropriation not contingent upon such a surplus.

Section 2

Better Budget and Finance Public Relations

Community and Staff Involvement in Budget Planning

As Presented by John Chaffee, Jr.
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Why involve community and staff in budget planning? Philosophically, there may be a desire on the part of the Superintendent or Board to put the public back into public education. Or, from a practical perspective, the desire to generate increased community or staff involvement may spring from declining public confidence — increasing complaints about administrative "frills" or why residents are paying more for fewer students to learn less? The combination of inflation and declining enrollments is a major contributor.

Following are a few techniques that can be used to generate more responsible and thus more useful community and staff input:

- Develop a 12-month budget preparation plan with a schedule of specific activities that include opportunities for community and staff input.
- Prepare simplified budget materials that can be easily understood by persons who are unfamiliar with financial and educational terminology. Highlight children and alternatives.
- Communicate with both general and special interest groups and invite their input. Parent-teacher groups provide an ideal "twofor" approach.
- Create citizen or staff advisory groups, if necessary, on a school-by-school or district-wide basis.
- Zero in on individual school sites, if possible.
- Hold public meetings or hearings and invite public input before final decisions are made.
- Concentrate on friends; don't waste time on enemies.
- Use your district's Public Information Officer (PIO) or assign someone to the community relations resposibility.

Passing School Finance Issues — Working With the Media

As presented by David J. Dickson
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The news media is an important ally in conducting successful school finance elections. A school district's day-to-day relationship with representatives of the news media will often influence how a district is represented in newspapers, on radio and television.

All school disricts need editorial support and well-written, factual news stories about their schools year 'round, as well as when they are attempting to pass finance measures. A solid working relationship with the media is a prerequisite for achieving this support.

Establishing this support from editors and reporters is not difficult for districts to attain. Like all other school district programs, working with the media throughout the year and during elections should be done on a well-planned and systematic format.

The 18 suggestions listed below will help you establish and maintain sound media relationships during your next finance election.

Year 'Round Activities

1) Develop a list of contact people in the mass media for news releases, special stories and other news purposes. This list will become important during election time and during any school related crisis.
2) Make time in your schedule to visit with the editors and reporters who cover your district, and do it at their offices. Get to know these people as individuals.
3) Learn about the media in your district. Find out when deadlines fall, the story formats for newspapers, their style and operations. Editors and reporters are forced to learn about your operation. It helps if you understand theirs.
4) Read the papers, listen to the radio stations and watch the television. Reporters will sense that you're knowledgeable about the media and that you care about what they write and report.
5) Be positive and truthful with the news media.
6) Don't lie, even though there are some facts that you'd rather not have out. Media relationships are built on truth and truth alone. This does not mean that you need to go into every single point and every single fact, but if a question is specifically asked of you, don't dodge it.

7) Don't ask, as a rule, to see a reporter's story unless it's to help correct technical information. However, the reporter or editor will find it useful if you check the facts with them about finance issues.
8) Tell a reporter when a story is well done — in writing, with a copy to his boss. All of us like to hear that we've done a good job.
9) All districts should have a written school board policy on communications, with one section pertaining to news media relations.
10) Be positive. Be enthusiastic. Be accurate. Be prompt. Be honest.

Activities During Finance Elections

1) Springboard off of your well-planned year 'round activities. Working with the media during an election should naturally fit into your year 'round plan. They, like the public, resent a large-scale burst of news only at election time.
2) Make certain that the news media is included in budget preparation from the beginning. They need a complete background on the budget. What it will provide, what will be added or cut from previous years, what it will cost citizens, why it is a sound budget.
3) Hold a question and answer session with the media as soon as possible after your Board approves your district's budget. Invite the editors and reporters who cover your district regularly. You'll need editorial support later. Make the meeting informal and answer all questions. The background they receive from this type of meeting and the support the district will receive is worth all the preparation. Make certain that they receive all available written information about the budget, too. They need this for reference and story use.
4) Make certain that the person(s) who will be answering questions about budget and election issues understand all the facts.
5) Encourage a representative of the media to participate with members of your citizens' advisory committee, if you have one.
6) Make certain that a member of your citizens' committee (if you have one) meets the media representatives. They too should know the editors and reporters.
7) Issue news releases or news of citizens' committee activities during an election campaign. The media and other people in the community are interested in what this group is doing.
8) Involve all the news media year 'round. Keep them informed and be honest with them. The results may surprise you!

Making Sense of the Budget — Explain It, Personalize It and Sell It!

As Presented by:
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You might ask: "Why bother making sense of the budget, no one ever reads a budget except maybe the financial institution people?"

Publicly supported agencies receiving tax monies owe their publics an explanation, in terms they can understand. If you have your public with you on little, everyday things, it will support you on larger things, *like bond issues!*

Most people don't understand budgets because they do not have the required experience, because budgets are usually presented in a mass of gray and they are confusing.

Ledger listings of figures by line items are negative and difficult for most of us to understand. Large figures are completely foreign to us and beyond our comprehension.

Explaining the budget effectively cannot be done unless it is personalized and made simple and then it will sell. Combine explanation with personalization and sell it!

Use the simplest terms and as few categorical breakdowns as possible.

Expenses: Salaries, fringes and benefits, supplies and materials, purchased services, capital outlay, other.

Revenues: Federal, state, county, local, cash on hand.

A simple graph or diagram helps the lay reader understand the figures. A pie graph with headings, amounts and percentages is a good graphic to go with the copy.

Explanation of revenues and expenses shows the community where the money originates and how it is spent.

Make sure the budget is explained to the community, even if you have to do it yourself. The media should do this at your budget hearing when your Board approves your budget, but don't rely upon them. And don't stop with media distribution. Use the information widely in your own publications for your staff so they, too, understand the information.

School Finance and the Courts (or I Have Some Good News and Some Bad News For You)

As Prepared by:
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In Colorado, as in many other states, a court decision has been rendered which declares that the current method of financing public schools is unconstitutional. While there are many problems in school finance, the one which the courts have noted most frequently is that some districts expend at a much lower rate per pupil than other districts, and that this lower spending is often due not to justified differences between districts, but rather to the wealth of the districts involved. States are facing the problem of developing improved school finance schemes which do meet the constitutional requirements as determinded by the courts.

What results from these attempts by state legislatures to deal with the problems of meeting court mandates will have significant implications for school districts in the future. It will be essential to communicate these changes — and the reasons for them — to students, parents and the community. This practice focuses on some of the potential directions this might take in the future and provides a look at school organization of the future and how some of these issues may be addressed.

Some Potential Implications (or the good news is . . ., the bad news is . . .)

- Equalization of operating expenditures. Requiring either holding higher spending districts down or increasing lower spending districts to close the disparity gap.
- Equalization of capital expenditures for facilities — site acquisition, major equipment items.
- Reorganization of school districts. The ultimate reorganization being one school district for the state which would reduce any disparity between districts.
- Statewide teacher and other staff salary schedules may be implemented and financed by the state.
- State program definitions of "basic" or "foundation" may be narrowly construed to provide funding only of these basic programs in order to "equalize" the provision of education.

- Systems may be implemented which provide for vouchers to be made to parents to purchase educational services at a place of their choice.
- Communities may be more responsible for the total education of children and adults, eliminating the current concept of school as we know it and replacing it with a much broader expanded community education program.
- Demands on state treasuries may be so great as to provide an overall reduction on requirements and reduced educational opportunities in order to fund all districts at an equal level.
- Curriculum and program may be determined at the state level in order to insure that only an equal educational opportunity is being provided and funded by the state.
- Staffing ratios may be determined at the state level which would allow for little flexibility in school districts but which would meet an equalized level across all state school districts.
- Significant changes could occur in the taxation schemes to provide educational services.
- Changes may occur in the staffing pattern of schools.

Enrollment Down/Cost Up: How to Explain it to Your Community

As prepared by:
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Why don't education costs drop when enrollments decline? You and I realize that school costs don't automatically drop when enrollments drop, but it's a difficult concept for John Q. Public to accept. Here's how we've tried to explain the problem to taxpayers of our district.

Each year the Business and Public Information Offices work together in developing a pamphlet which explains in as simple terms as possible what is happening to the budget, what the effect will be on local taxes and what outside forces are influencing the budgeting process. (Our district uses a zero base budgeting process, and this is explained in the pamphlet.) This pamphlet won a first place award in the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) publication contest in 1978. Each year, at least two pages in the eight-inch by five-inch pamphlet deal with the subject of rising costs in the face of declining enrollments.

Our 1979 booklet included a section entitled, "Keeping the Lid on the Budget," and included short paragraphs — including examples — on each of the following factors which contributed to rising costs:

- *Inflation* — includes a chart that shows the percentage rate of increase, over the past five years, for the cost of living, our school budget and local property taxes. It points out that we have been cutting back, but inflation is still pushing us up.
- *Highly qualified staff* — points out that as staff reductions are made, our more experienced teachers are retained, and they are also our more expensive teachers.
- *Programs* — additional programs, mandated by the state and federal governments or by the community itself are highlighted here.
- *Utilities* — included in a discussion of utility costs is a chart showing how our utility costs have doubled in the past five years.
- *Building costs* —pointing to a district-wide decline of 500 students as an example, this section explains that it takes a number of years to actually reduce a few classrooms when that 500 is spread through 50 buildings.

The pamphlet may be obtained by writing: Public Information Office, Topeka Public Schools, 624 W. 24th, Topeka, Kansas 66611, and asking for *Special Report: The Budget '79-'80."*

Form an Advisory Committee for Your Business Office

As presented by:
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How well informed are your constituents in the broad area of school finance, including revenues, expenditures, budgeting and accounting? Jimmy the Greek would probably establish the odds at about 1,000 to 1 that there are very few, if any, who could be classified as experts in even one or two of these important facets of school finance.

You can gain support for your school district and build credibility for your administration by forming an advisory committee of key community leaders. You should educate them about the mysteries of school finance and seek their advice about the best methods of disseminating important and accurate information to the public.

Who should be on the committee? If possible, include leaders from every identifiable segment of the community — geographic, socio-economic and political. You need all the support you can get. Include leaders from business, industry and labor, finance experts from fields other than education; teachers and power actors; minority and opposition representatives; and representatives of agriculture where applicable.

Eight Ideas That Will Enhance Your PR Program

1) Develop and disseminate a glossary of school finance terms with understandable definitions.
2) Develop teaching materials on major school finance laws and arrange for training sessions on the subject.
3) Schedule regular monthly meetings of your Advisory Committee. Prepare an agenda for each meeting. Keep meetings relatively short (not more than two hours).
4) Keep meetings on a positive note. Do not permit meetings to degenerate into "gripe" sessions. However, listen and respect constructive criticism that will help identify real or potential problem areas. No school system is perfect.
5) Distribute copies of financial reports to committee members and explain them. Solicit opinion for increasing report readability.
6) Invite representatives of the local news media to all sessions. They need this background.
7) Limit the length of term for Advisory Committee members to one year.
8) Involve the committee in budget planning and research.

Section 3

Better Pupil Transportation Public Relations

Communications and the School Bus Transportation Department: Things You Can Do Now to Improve Public Relations

As Presented by:
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Every school transportation department needs to constantly work toward promoting three essential goals: passenger safety; building good bus driver morale; and improving school-community-relations.

Promote Passenger Safety Through Better Communications.

Every transportation department should have a fleet maintenance and repair system. Records of all work done and material used should be maintained. These records are important both for cost and equipment analysis and, in the event of a serious accident, they provide necessary information.

Some tips for publicizing the promotion of safety through maintenance and repair are:

- Publicize safety checks by local law enforcement officers during inspections.
- Ask for the news media's help in promoting safety at the beginning of the school year.
- Work with state or regional agencies to tie in with their promotion campaigns.

- Establish monthly meetings for drivers to discuss safety, routes, discipline, evacuations and related subjects.
- Establish a "mock" disaster drill in cooperation with the local police and fire departments.

Are Your Drivers "Big Wheels" in Communications?

As a group, bus drivers are one of your school system's most important — and maybe most neglected — communicators. Drivers are "key communicators" and need to be kept informed. Here are a few suggestions for keeping drivers informed:

- Make community relations skills and responsibilities a part of both new driver training and experienced in-service driver training.
- Promote opportunities for driver recognition. An annual Bus Drivers' Rodeo is one example.
- Adopt a school bus driver's badge, one that incorporates an appropriate design and the driver's name.
- Ask bus drivers to be represented in school meetings, orientations and convocations early in the school year and follow up with smaller classroom sessions to emphasize safety and bus rules.
- Fulfill your human relations obligations to each driver: know each employee by name and make personal contact; get out of the office, see what's going on; Be available; be firm, fair and predictable; treat drivers equally and be consistent; reserve judgements until all sides are heard; and don't pass the buck, respond individually to all problems.
- Have "tailgate sessions" — meet informally with drivers to discuss routes, safety and discipline.

Improving School-Community Relations

Students, teachers, parents, principals and the news media are all interested in what the transportation department is doing. Keep them informed by:

- Developing brochures or leaflets to explain bus rules.
- Attending meetings of concerned citizens.
- Granting interviews to the news media on such topics as the gasoline situation and its effect on your district; the need for discipline policies; and school bus safety.
- Being available to principals and teachers; listening to their concerns.
- Making periodic status reports to the Board of Education. Keep them informed.

Communicating Cutbacks in Transportation Service

As Presented by:
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"I'm in favor of saving energy if it doesn't affect me, my family, my environment or my life style."

That statement pretty well sums up the feeling today of Mr. John Q. Public. How then, can we cutback transportation service to save energy, to save dollars and still maintain favorable public relations? Here are some examples:

1) Accept the fact that a cutback will not be a PR "plus."
2) A special Board meeting calls attention to a special problem: the need to cut back on transportation service.
3) Establish new transportation guidelines based on your School Board's directives.
4) Establish priorities for handling various types of complaints.
5) Survey parents by telephone for public opinion.
6) Prepare letters to parents with new routes.
7) Prepare press releases.
8) Prepare letters to be used by the Transportation Department acknowledging the parents' concern and advising that no change will be made or that a change has been made.
9) Direct phone calls from parents to your most courteous personnel to log complaints as soon as information is released to the public. Assign additional staff to handle telephone calls for three weeks.
10) Log each call in duplicate on separate sheets. Record as much information as possible for the Transportation Department and for subsequent contact by phone or letter.
11) Sort calls by name and by bus.
12) Match repeat calls — second, thrid, fourth, etc.
13) Before the caller hangs up, assign a priority number.
14) Be prepared for group meetings with small groups of parents who come to the office.
15) Be prepared for parents who will talk to no one but the Superintendent. An administrative assistant sometimes is effective.

Transportation Department

1) Review each request with an open mind.
2) Resolve not to give in to pressure by individuals or groups if a change is not warranted.
3) Assign one person, if possible, to make those judgmental decisions which involve so-called hazardous conditions, based on a personal inspection when necessary.
4) Respond to complaints received as promptly as possible using an appropriate form letter.

Board Meetings

1) Be prepared for parents who want to be heard at a Board meeting.
2) Preliminary remarks by the Superintendent to the Board of Education might include: number of calls received; number of changes made; reduction in the number of bus stops; estimated reduction in miles traveled; and estimated savings in fuel;
3) Respond to parents addressing the Board by mail, not at the public meeting.

Kids Behave On Our Buses

As presented by:
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Discipline problems on buses can undermine a school's image, so we think it's important that kids behave on our buses.

Communication is our public relations tool. Yes, we have had the usual press releases telling the "subject story." We have had *The Bridge*, a publication by the district about the district. We have had weekly radio programs and all the other types of publicity that gave information to the public.

But we continued having problems until we began using discipline forms. The form we are discussing here is our *School Bus Incident Report*. This is a type of personal communication that has worked in dealing with problems. The idea is not new; it is used in many districts. We have used it for the past three years, and it has been effective for us. It is simple and easy to use.

We found that good public relations can be destroyed when bus drivers lose control of their passengers. Some bus drivers never have a problem, a few always have problems, but most have some problems. These problems are the kind that by word of mouth can cause the destruction of your good public relations.

Our *School Bus Incident Report* is simply a three-part form given by the driver to a problem student to communicate a rules infraction to the parents and the principal.

It works because:

- Parents don't want their child to cause problems on the bus.
- Parents don't want to have to drive their child to and from school.
- Most importantly, parents are involved. Therefore, they are willing to discipline their child.

The form is used in three steps:

1) Upon the first infraction, to warn parents and principals that there is a problem;
2) After the second infraction, to put the student off the bus for one to two weeks; and
3) After the third infraction, to put the student off the bus for a longer period of time, possibly for the balance of the school year.

There are many positive results from using this report form:

1) The parents and the principal cooperate to correct the problem.
2) The problem is taken out of the hands of the bus driver.
3) Since parents are involved in the complete problem before any discipline is administered, they are usually 100% cooperative.
4) Good communications result in improved public relations because: the parents have become good friends of the school and spread the good word about the schools; and the drivers are happy and give the students good feelings as they arrive at school or at home.

If your PR is suffering because of a bus discipline problem, consider trying this type of communication; it may resolve your problem so that you too can say, *"Kids behave on our buses."*

Section 4

Better Community and Student Public Relations

News Releases That Make News

As presented by:
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The responsibility of the news media is to present the news. In that capacity, they do not and should not serve as publicity chairmen or public relations officers for any institution. So how can you get your news in the paper and on the air? Here are five tried and proven suggestions:

1) *Keep your nose in the news* — Keep up to date with what items make news. Get subscriptions to major newspapers for your office. Keep a radio and small TV nearby for listening to and viewing news reports. Clip articles published about your school district and keep them on file.
2) *Know your reporters and help them do their job* — Keep an up to date list of names, phone numbers and addresses of all reporters covering the schools. Make a point to know them and find out what their special needs are. What time is their deadline? What format can you use that will make their job easier? What area of education are they most interested in covering? Stay abreast of national education issues discussed in magazines and journals and localize these topics for your reporters.
3) *Prepare a readable format for news releases* — Leave plenty of room for editor's notes. Releases should be double or triple spaced, dated and written in a professional journalistic style. All opinions should be in quotes and attributed to the proper person with his or her complete title. Avoid in-house jargon and acronyms. The source of the news release should be immediately clear to a reader. Always

include the name and phone number of a person to be contacted for further information. Keep on file all news releases sent to the media.

4) *Edit your news before the news edits you* — Send news releases that are worth reading. They should, in fact, have a point, be timely and informative. If you don't think it's a newsworthy item, you're probably right. Don't clutter the editor's desk. They'll always be grateful.

5) *Follow up when it's a good story* — If you have an important story, call ahead and say your release is on the way. Editors or reporters may want to save a slot. Or, after you send an important release, call to see if additonal background is needed or if you can be of further help. Never demand that a reporter cover your story.

School District Publications

As presented by:
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Weld County School District 6
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One guaranteed way to save time (and money), reduce repetitive, boring tasks and provide reliable, accurate sources of information is to create school district publications that are available to everyone.

Save time (and money): In response to questions about the district, requests for information, program descriptions or basic facts and figures, it is efficient and informative to send a brochure or booklet that has been carefully prepared.

Publications often eliminate detailed letters that are time consuming to write. They tend to promote consistent, accurate information. They can represent the district in a planned, professional, competent way.

Reduce repetitive, boring tasks: Job enrichment experts agree that motivation is increased when jobs are interesting. Replying to a constant series of the same questions is dull. A publication can quickly provide basic, background and general information.

Provide reliable, accurate sources of information: Publications provide the same answers to questions, quickly and easily. Confusion and misinformation are generally eliminated. By using a publication to provide basic facts, everyone in the District is saying the same thing.

The key to effective publications is a program that provides consistent, attractive, easily recognizable printed pieces. Every publication printed by

your district should meet previously established quality standards. All publications should "look" like they came from the same organization.

Graphic Design: If your district does not have a graphic designer, hire one to create a publications program. Create a basic, flexible format that includes the use of a logo, logotype and standard formats for simple brochures, newsletters, letterhead and cover design. In general, school district publications should reflect quality but give a fairly modest appearance.

Don't leave design to chance to a printer, or even an editor. Strive for planned, organized publications with a clean, airy format. The professional image that a good publication projects will repeatedly earn the cost of the design.

The Words: Write and re-write in a simple language. Make it short, friendly, and positive. The financial data should be treated in easily understood graphics with charts, graphs, or other illustrative materials.

1) Know your audience — Have your purpose clearly in mind. Publications that exist without goals seldom are effective. Know what you want to do, who your audience is, what you want to tell them and then decide how to do it.
2) Select a format within your capabilities — Plan a small budget publication if that's the reality. There is no excuse for producing a bad publication because you failed to accurately assess your resources.
3) Experiment — Don't be afraid to try new ideas. Borrow freely from your colleagues in other school systems. Ask for help if you need it.

Possible Publications

Here are some publication ideas. This list is not all-inclusive. Few school districts would need all the publications listed.

Internal Publications

- Board Briefs
- Communications Guidebook
- Curriculum Idea Exchange Bulletin
- Employee Manual (all employees)
- Letterhead, Business Cards, Memo Notes, Mailing Labels, Name Tags
- New Employee Packet
- News Release Tip Sheets
- Parent-Teacher Conference Brochure
- Pay Envelope Stuffer
- Resource Center Brochure
- Specialized Employee Handbooks for Faculty, Administrators, Secretaries, Food Service Employees, Bus Drivers, etc.
- Staff Newsletter
- Student Handbooks
- Substitute Teacher Handbook
- Telephone Communications Brochure

External Publications

- Basic Facts Card and Calendar (wallet size)
- Community Newsletter
- Curriculum and Special Service Brochures
- Guidance Booklets
- Music Programs
- Parent-Student Handbooks
- Report Card Stuffer
- Special Purpose Publications on topics such as Child Abuse and Immunizations
- Staff Recruitment Brochure

Internal and External Publications

- Annual Report
- Boundary Maps
- Budget and Bond Issue Publications
- Facts and Figures Brochure
- School Building Newsletters
- Schoolyear Calendar

Preparing a Booklet-Style School Calendar

As presented by:
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A school calendar booklet is a valuable public relations tool. If the finished product is professional and polished, it presents a similar image of the school district. The combination of usefulness and professionalism is unbeatable for contributing to a school district's positive public image.

Aurora Public Schools has been publishing a calendar for at least seven years, and it is easily our most popular publication. That statement is especially significant in light of the fact that the district also publishes a regular community newsletter six times a year, two employee newsletters per month, monthly calendars, board meeting summaries, bus schedule inserts for local newspapers, maps, brochures and pamphlets. The calendar is popular with students, parents, teachers, administrators, board members, doctors, realtors, the Chamber of Commerce, home builders, shopping center managers and many other persons whose daily lives or businesses are effected by the schedules and events of the school district.

Our booklet calendar consists of 24 pages, including front and back covers. Each page is 9 inches in height by 12 inches in length (horizontally). This size enables several calendars to be mailed in a 10 by 13-inch manila envelope. A hole is drilled in the middle of the bottom edge so the calendar may be hung.

The covers are reserved for the name of the publication, the name of the district, the logo and some artwork. Twelve of the inside pages portray the actual days and weeks of each month in block form. The date blocks or boxes are 1-5/6 inches in height by 1-3/4 inches wide. Seven boxes may be placed across the page, with six rows or weeks per page. There are no margins around the sides or bottom of the calendar page, but approximately 3/8 inch should be left at the top to print the name of the appropriate month.

The pages facing each month of dates are filled with information about the school district. Type is set in three columns of 3 1/4 inches wide with 7/16 inch sides. A 1/2-inch margin is allowed at the top for headlines and the drilled hole.

Basically, the placement of information on the calendar is dependent upon the type and amount. Most events and meetings are printed in the appropriate calendar date box. These items include holidays, minimal days, report card issue dates, proms, homecomings, parent organization meetings, standing committee meetings, Board of Education meetings, school picture dates and major high school theatrical productions.

Information on the facing pages is usually in the form of longer articles about programs, services, student rights and responsibilities, immunization requirements and other topics. The names and photos of board members and key administrators also may be included. These pages are flexible and special features can be designed to meet the needs of different school districts. For example, some districts chose to list all athletic events for the month on the facing page.

The Aurora Public Schools' calendar is distributed to all children in the district at their schools. All staff members and board members also receive a copy. Other recipients include local businesses, the Chamber of Commerce, real estate agents, home builders, doctors, shopping center managers and neighboring school districts.

Process for Preparation

1) The board or administration establishes the basic calendar for the upcoming school year.
2) Those responsible for producing the calendar meet with principals from elementary, junior highs or middle schools and high schools to discuss development of the calendar, the kind of information desired from them, deadlines and establishment of common dates for events such as report card distribution. These meetings also help schools avoid conflicts between activities, especially those which have a potential for student, parent, board and administration attendance. This process serves to coordinate many activities.

3) Similar meetings may also be held with directors or administrators in charge of areas such as special education, curriculum, counseling, vocational education and athletics.
4) Memos and data gathering forms are sent to all persons involved in meetings or who otherwise would have information to be included in the calendar. Be sure to include a deadline for returning the forms. Enforce the deadline, even if it means the conspicuous absence of a school or program from the calendar.
5) While data gathering forms are out, contact printers; obtain bids on producing the calendar; and select the appropriate company.
6) Work closely with your chosen printer on actual production: developing specifications which may be unique for your school district; meeting a delivery date which is advantageous to both the district and printer; setting type, format and layout. *Hint:* It saves time and money if copy is prepared and edited tightly before being sent to the printer for typesetting. The time to edit is before the words are cast in type.

A calendar which is well done and attempts to be useful will take several months to produce. The process is slow at the start, but the pace becomes breakneck near the final printing date.

Working With Community Groups on Special Projects

As presented by:
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Working with individuals and groups in the community on special projects usually earns an *A-Plus* and offers and excellent opportunity to gain positive PR for a school district. A valuable opportunity to highlight the accomplishments of the school district exists while working with group members who not only represent a cross-section of the community, but often include non-parents who are an important but sometimes difficult group with which to communicate. Becoming acquainted with school district representatives and perhaps having on-the-spot experience in the schools can make boosters of people who previously have been uninformed or uninterested.

Business services employees have many community contacts and can play an important role in a school district's efforts to work with the community by:

- Suggesting names of persons to serve on advisory committees;
- Suggesting training stations for work-study programs;
- Suggesting persons who would be interesting guest speakers;
- Suggesting speakers and field trips for Career Education activities;
- Being active in community activities;
- Getting to know the school district's information officer.

The shrinking dollar for instructional materials and programs needs help which often can be provided by projects conducted by community organizations which also can supply volunteers to work with students. Just as the school district often needs assistance from the community, community groups often look to the school district to help them meet organizational goals, such as supporting education and conducting special projects.

Working with community groups can result in good PR and valuable contributions to the community. However, it is important that the school district retain control of management of the projects as they relate to students. Make certain that:

- The project does not violate district policies;
- The project does not interfere with the academic programs;
- The project does not use students as a captive audience;
- The project fits the school district's goals for students;
- The timeframe allows for doing a good job;
- If the project does not fit the district's policies, suggest other ways the sponsors could conduct the project.

Working With Realtors

As presented by:
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"What are the local schools like?"
"What school will my child attend?"

These are among the first questions new residents are apt to ask when they are looking for a new home. A real estate salesperson can give customers a good introduction to your schools — or he can cause you problems and create bad feelings. What a realtor does is up to you!

If the real estate people in your community are going to disseminate accurate information about your schools, someone has to provide them with that information. It doesn't just happen. Realtors or prospective buyers may ask the present owner what school their children will attend — and maybe that owner hasn't had a child in school in years! Maybe they will guess, because they see a school nearby, and they don't know who to call to check the information.

Here are some of the things that worked in our fast-growing district to turn a bad public relations problem into a good working relationship:

1) Publication of attendance boundary maps. Our district covers the city of Loveland (population 35,000) and 360 square miles of mountain and valley country. We are growing at an annual rate of about 5% and annually opening at least one new school. Our attendance boundaries change each year! We now publish a set of two maps each year (one city, one surrounding area) and distribute a set to each of the 60-plus realty offices within our district.
2) *A Realtors Handbook of School Information* is published each year and distributed to every real estate salesperson through the Board of Realtors. It attempts to answer some of the most commonly asked questions about our schools. It currently includes:
   - Attendance area information.
   - Entrance age requirements (and immunization laws).
   - Transportation policies.
   - Suggestions for parents moving into the school district (how to handle transfer of records and enrolling in the new district).
   - The calendar for the current school year.
   - List of schools, with the name of the principal, address and phone number.
   - Pre-schools in the area (not a function of the public schools, but this information is included because it is hard to find elsewhere and people frequently ask for it! It has been appreciated.)
3) Establish a friendly, helpful working relationship with local realtors. One good way to do this is to take your maps and/or handbooks personally to a realtors meeting and introduce the information to them. Let them know a name and a face that is at the other end of a telephone line, to help them answer their customers questions. Encourage them to call and refer people to you, so that prospective new residents in the district can get accurate information right from the beginning. Emphasize that their customers will be better satisfied with them as well as with the school district!

This system has worked for us. Real Estate salespeople are now among our most frequent callers. We still get an occasional upset homeowner who finds himself in a different school area than he thought — but the instances are far fewer than they used to be.

Be sure to follow through once you have established yourself with your

realtors. Our hand book and maps are updated yearly. I always go to the weekly realtors meeting to distribute them personally and remind the salespeople that I am there, and glad to answer their questions.

In a growing district like ours, it is easy to see the value of working with real estate people. It is also important to work closely with real estate people in other types of districts. Whether moving to a new community or within an old one, people have questions about the schools. Are you closing schools instead of opening new ones? Do you have busing or some other desegragation plan? New residents will need to know — and so will your real estate people.

If you are a good public relations agent for your schools, you can easily help your real estate people to be the same!

School Desegregation and Public Relations

As presented by:
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School business is *people business.* So expect the unexpected!

- *School desegregation in one community is not school desegregation in another!*
- *Don't be afraid to say more than people want to hear!*

Way back before court-ordered integration (after the Noel Resolution in May 1968), the Denver schools sounded an alert, telling the community of the need to integrate its schools. One brochure got right to the point — "First and foremost is the emphasis on a comprehensive plan," it stated. There followed some 165 column inches of 8-point type with detail piled upon detail.

The schools had taken on yet another teaching job — showing people that integration is a subject rooted in the emotional, financial and social aspects of the community as a whole.

The Board of Education had requested an integration plan and school leaders tried in every way to quash fears parents had that their child was being singled out from among 96 000 pupils, their child's school from among 120 schools.

Denver has never underestimated the value of having reminded parents and pupils that desegregation was taking place system-wide and that it was one among a number of events of national significance.

- *Let people know that school leaders are responding, not just reacting!*

That same 1968 brochure made a point of talking about "provisions for

thoughtful consideration and refinement" and tied the proposed plan to "quality education."

By September 1974, when Judge William E. Doyle issued his Final Judgment and Decree that catapulted the schools into full-time busing, the public wrote hundreds of frantic letters and made thousands of phone calls.

The district set up an Information Center deliberately and carefully staffed with some remarkable women — each blessed with vast patience, unfailing tact and unlimited willingness to listen. Each had the brains to sort through a myriad of information to find answers quickly.

There was also a task force, school people with the best organizational minds who were assigned to plot pupil and teacher reassignments. We were not reluctant to tell the world what we were doing.

• *Appeal to the community's strengths!*

Denver earned a reputation during World War II as a friendly Western town. But by 1974 there had been sporadic violence connected with integration efforts — the bombing of the administration building, the burning of 30 buses, racial fights in some senior high schools.

But communication overcame some of the fears. There were public meetings in some of the schools with TV coverage by the district's educational station, Channel 6; speakers bureaus; Idea Exchange Centers; televised School Board conferences.

By the late '70s, one civic leader could say, "It is clearly apparent that the citizens of Denver . . . do want to move ahead . . . Denverites feel a humanistic and moral commitment for alleviating *de facto* segregation."

• *Get people talking together, working together!*

During one of the days of crisis, Johnny Wilson, principal at what had been a so-called "black school," met the fears of whites about to be bused to his school head on. He used the quilting-bee approach.

Wilson said, "We had all kinds of meetings the summer before school opened . . . most were with people of goodwill. In order to remove the barrier of fear, we held task-oriented sessions for the kids from the southeast (the whites). They mailed invitations, made name tags, put together students handbooks . . . It gave them a chance to meet each other and make their own judgments, not just depend on what they heard from their parents."

• *Strive for community support through understanding!*

Public participation has been a key in Denver's experience. Despite the district's desegregation being tailored as a result of a court order, Denver's citizenry has been given a multitude of chances to talk it all over.

John Finger, author of the desegregation plan drafted by the court for Denver in 1974, said at the time, "I wish the citizens of Denver would know and believe that the bringing of people together is better than the alternative of keeping them apart."

Public relations in the Denver Public Schools has proceeded with the echo of that statement, with every effort made to bring them together.

Public Relations Aspects of Energy Management Programs

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Since 1973, it has been the goal of the Lincoln Public Schools to reduce consumption of vital energy resources within day to day operations of the system without negatively affecting instructional activities and programs for student and community use of school facilities.

The prime consideration for heating comfort is that classrooms will be at maximum heating temperatures during the period of time that classes are in session and that staff and public users may continue to use the building at lower temperatures.

To continue to provide for community use of facilities, long range renovation plans provide that in certain facilities and in limited areas there will be the ability to maintain appropriate heating/cooling levels for their particular use.

Energy Management Program

The total district energy program is a composite of plans prepared for each individual facility. Since a facility has different use patterns, different types of construction, differently designed heating and ventilating systems, may or may not have been recently renovated, each has its own heat gain and loss characteristics.

Due to these different physical conditions and outside weather conditions, the time required to change the temperature from a minimum to an appropriate level varies in each building. As a result, a uniform district-wide start-up and set-back time would be inappropriate. Therefore, the Operations and Maintenance Division has developed, with the principal of each building, a plan to be approved by the Office of Business Affairs and posted in each building for the public, staff and students to see.

Public Relations Tips for Conserving Energy

1) *Adopt An Energy Conservation Policy.* Formal approval of your energy conservation policy by the Board of Education will provide

structure and top level acceptance of your district's plan. Also, newspaper coverage and public information about Board proceedings will alert community members.

2) *External Energy Management Team.* Identify key contacts in the State Energy Office, the State Department of Education, local higher education agencies and public and private utilities. Utilize these experts to identify and provide energy information for your district.
3) *Internal Energy Management Team.* Identify and assign responsibilities to District members of the team. For example: A Board of Education adopts energy policy; Superintendent of Schools recommends policy; Business Office administers energy program by collecting and monitoring energy consumption; Operation and Maintenance implements program; and District building staff members support the energy program through participation.
4) *Introduce Parent Groups to the Energy Policy.* Make presentations to groups of parents at building level meetings or district-wide meetings to explain the energy policy and to address parent concerns on a personal basis.
5) *Form a District Energy Advisory Committee.* Use Building level representatives in an advisory capacity to provide information about building related energy activities. This is an excellent approach to maintain communications with building staff.
6) *Feature Energy Topics in District Newsletters.* Prepare newsworthy articles about energy events in the district highlighting consumption results, budget implications, training program or innovative instructional lessons about energy conservation.
7) *Compile and Analyze Building Energy Data.* Start reading utility bills and begin to prepare consumption data by building. Analyze costs and units consumed for electricity, natural gas, fuel oil, propane, water, sewer and other types of energy. Compare buildings using BTU/square foot and BTU/square foot/Degree.
8) *Post Energy Conservation Signs.* Reminders to conserve energy by turning off lights, keeping doors and windows closed, using mass transportation, carpooling or walking, have an impact on individual efforts to participate in energy conserving actions. Use stickers on bumpers, light switches, doors or windows; posters on bulletin boards and pamphlets to emphasize energy conservations.
9) *Energy Related Staff Development.* Plan energy topics for staff meetings. Contact resource people in the community to talk to your staff about energy issues. Remember your state energy office and utility companies can provide a strong message for energy conservation in the District as well as at home.

Crisis Communications During Labor Relations Problems

As presented by:
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Following is a concise outline of what your district can do to ease a crisis and improve communications when the district is experiencing labor relations problems. There are three steps which I call: Pre-Plan; During the Action; and After the Ball.

Pre-Plan

1. Setting your objectives.
   - A. Keep Schools Open
   - B. Substitute Use
   - C. Use of Administrative and Supervisory Staff
   - D. Informing Students and Patrons
   - E. Informing Media (who, what, why)
   - F. Inform Teachers of Actions That May be Taken
2. Role of Administrators
   - A. Define
   - B. Chain of Command
   - C. Meetings
   - D. Picketing
   - E. Choosing Sides

During the Action

1. Community Public Communication
   - A. Service Clubs
   - B. PTA
   - C. Neighborhood Coffees
2. Board of Education
   - A. Designate Spokesperson
   - B. Meet Regularly

After the Ball

1. Calming the Waters
   - A. Board
   - B. Central Staff
   - C. Principals